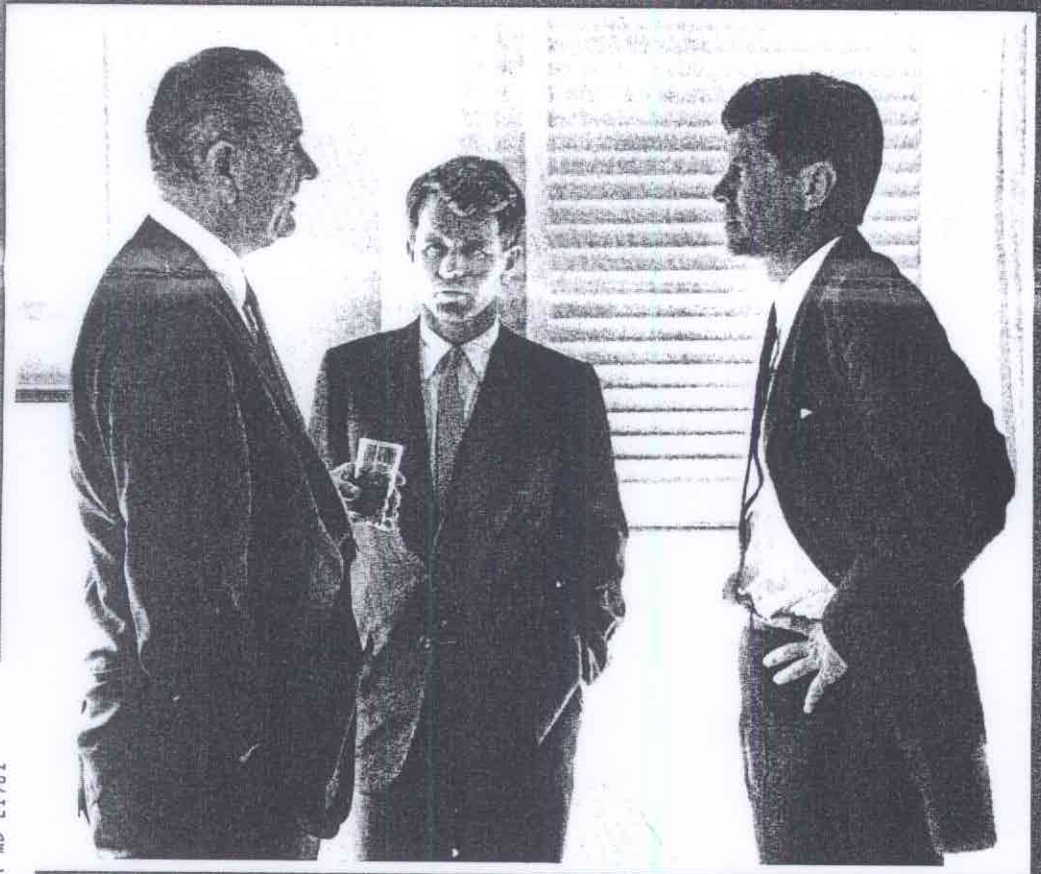
LIFE

- Why LBJ was really picked
- How the Kennedys managed him
- LBJ's feud with Bobby

An intimate report by Kenneth O'Donnell

JOHNSON AND THE KENNEDYS



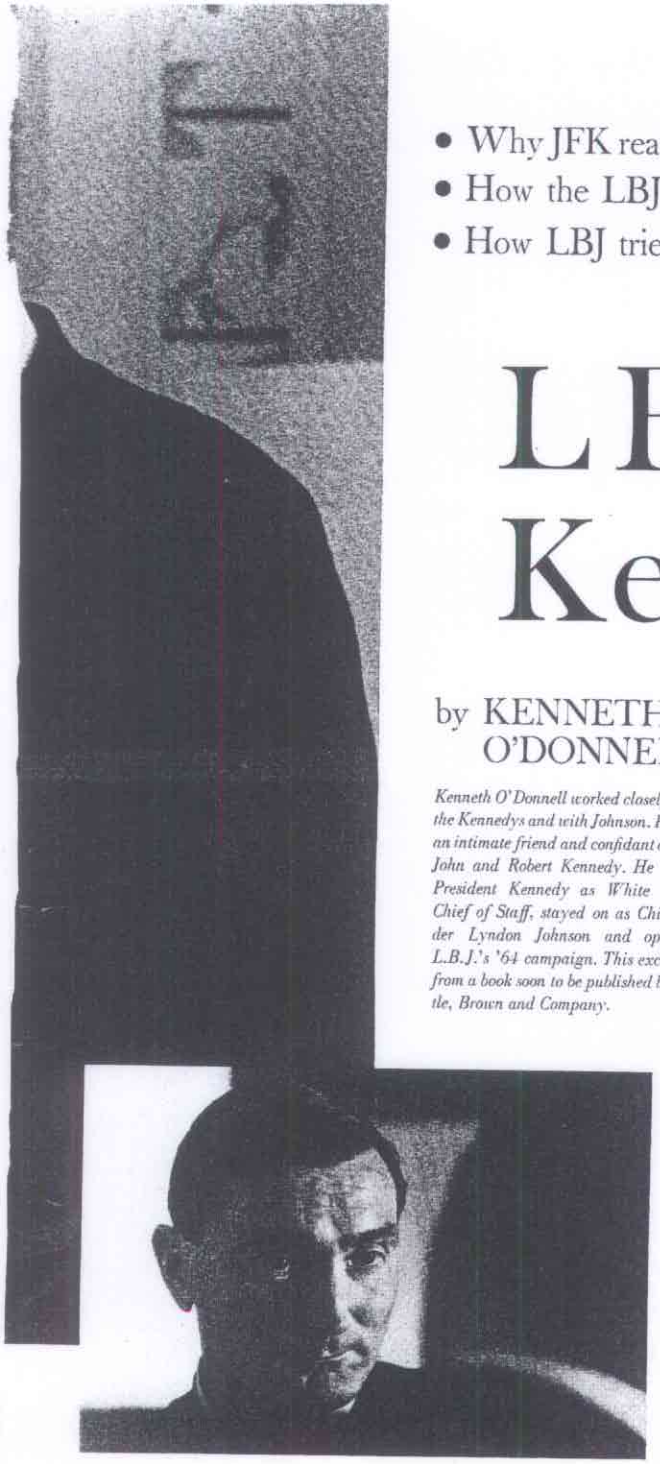
At the 1960 convention Lyndon Johnson
discusses the Vice Presidency offer with the Kennedy brothers

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In the Biltmore Hotel suite President-elect Kennedy and his Vice Presidential choice Lyndon Johnson worry together over the possibility of a floor fight during the 1960 convention. The author, Kenneth O'Donnell (right, listening to J.F.K.), argued against picking Johnson, but could not sway Kennedy.



- Why JFK really picked LBJ as his running mate
- How the LBJ-Bobby feud began
- How LBJ tried to ditch Humphrey in 1964

LBJ and the Kennedys

by KENNETH O'DONNELL

Kenneth O'Donnell worked closely with the Kennedys and with Johnson. He was an intimate friend and confidant of both John and Robert Kennedy. He served President Kennedy as White House Chief of Staff, stayed on as Chief under Lyndon Johnson and operated L.B.J.'s '64 campaign. This excerpt is from a book soon to be published by Little, Brown and Company.

There have been many stories circulated since the 1960 Democratic Convention about why John Kennedy gave the Vice Presidency to Lyndon Johnson. Surprisingly, the real story has never come out. On that hectic Thursday morning, when Bobby Kennedy and I were trying to recover from the shock of his offer to Johnson, John Kennedy told me his reasons.

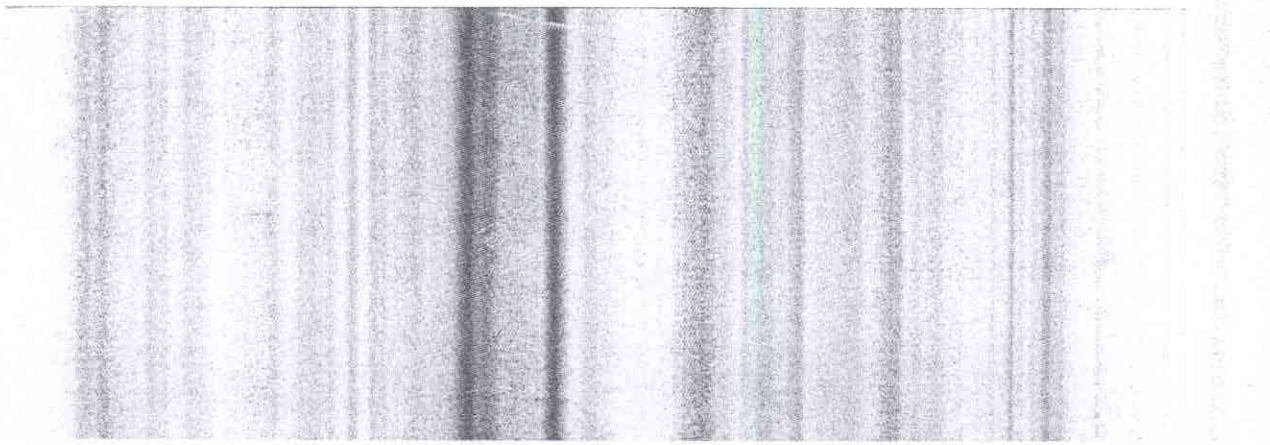
The Kennedy suite in the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles was filled with a throng of Northern Democratic leaders, the old pros like David Lawrence and Bill Green of Pennsylvania, Mike DiSalle of Ohio, John Bailey, Abe Ribicoff, Dick Daley, all of them milling around Kennedy and congratulating him for offering the Vice Presidency to Johnson. Jack was saying that he had just talked with Lyndon, and Lyndon wanted a little time to think it over but it looked as though he would take it. "Johnson has the strength where you need it most," David Lawrence was saying to Kennedy. I could have belted Lawrence. I was vehemently against the Johnson selection because it represented precisely the kind of cynical, old-style politics we were trying to get away from. I also knew our liberal friends would be appalled by it.

When Jack Kennedy saw the expression on my face, he beckoned to Bobby Kennedy and me to follow him into the bedroom. The bedroom was crowded with people, too, and realizing that I was about to explode, Jack said to Bobby, "I'd better talk to Kenny alone in the bathroom." We went into the bathroom and closed the door behind us.

"This is the worst mistake you ever made," I said to him. "You came out here to this convention like a knight on a white charger, the clean-cut young fav

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John Kennedy toasts old friend Dave Powers (far left) at surprise 50th-birthday party the President threw in his honor in the White House Cabinet Room in April 1963.

A month later, in May 1963, Powers threw a surprise birthday party for the President. Jackie watched him open gag gifts, like "debate rules" from Richard Nixon and a toy rocker.







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League college guy who's promising to get rid of the old political ways. And now, in your first move, you go against all the people who supported you. Are we going to spend the whole campaign apologizing for Lyndon Johnson and trying to explain why he voted against everything you ever stood for?"

He became pale, livid with anger, so upset and hurt that it took him a while before he was able to collect himself.

"Wait a minute," he said. "I've offered it to him, but he hasn't accepted it yet and maybe he won't. If he does, let's get one thing clear."

I never forgot what he said next.

"I'm 43 years old, and I'm the healthiest candidate for President in the United States. You've traveled with me enough to know that. I'm not going to die in office. So the Vice Presidency doesn't mean anything. I'm thinking of something else, the leadership in the Senate. If we win, it will be by a small margin and I won't be able to live with Lyndon Johnson as the leader of a small Senate majority. Did it occur to you that if Lyndon becomes the Vice President, I'll have Mike Mansfield as the Senate leader, somebody I can trust and depend on?"

That thought never *had* occurred to me or, incredibly enough, to anyone else around John Kennedy. Bobby had wanted Henry Jackson for Vice President; I had been for Stuart Symington. I had never heard anyone even mention Johnson's name. But Kennedy saw it differently, and the way he explained it sounded like an elementary history lecture.

He reminded me that Congress was still in session and that he had to go back to the Senate and put on a fight for the issues in his platform—housing, urban renewal, Medicare, relief for depressed areas. By not permanently adjourning Congress, Johnson and Sam Rayburn figured they could pressure various members of Congress in the state delegations into supporting Johnson for President at Los Angeles if the House and the Senate remained in session for the rest of the summer.

"If Johnson and Rayburn leave here mad at me," Kennedy said, "they'll ruin me in Congress next month. Then I'll be the laughingstock of the country. Nixon will say I haven't any power in my own party, and I'll lose the election before Labor Day. So I've got to make peace now with Johnson and Rayburn, and offering Lyndon the Vice Presidency, whether he accepts it or not, is one way of keeping him friendly until Congress adjourns. All of this is more important to me than Southern votes, which I won't get anyway with the Catholic thing working against me. I doubt if Lyndon will even be able to carry Texas, as Dave Lawrence and all those other pols out in the other room are claiming we will."

One of my jobs was keeping the Labor leaders happy and all of them were against Johnson. Kennedy opened the bathroom door and called Bobby

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An aide's album pictures catch JFK in a party mood

They had a set routine for handling Johnson's complaints

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in to join us. "Now the two of you can go and see Walter Reuther and George Meany and get to work on them," he said.

While we were gone, bedlam broke out in the suite. Michigan Governor "Soapy" Williams, fighting mad, told a group of Southern governors he would lead a floor fight against Johnson. Jack Kennedy, sitting with one leg hanging over the arm of a chair, watched the whole angry scene without saying a word. He was far and away the toughest of the Kennedys. Bobby used to say, "We can't fire that fellow because he's got five kids." Jack would say, "I'm sorry about his five kids, but he can't handle the job the way I want it handled, so he's out—and let's not have any more talk about it. Put him someplace else, but get him out of there."

After Johnson had relayed the word to the Kennedy suite that he was ready to take the nomination, Bobby and I returned and told Jack that the labor leaders were furious and threatening to put up a candidate of their own. Jack told his brother to go right downstairs and inform Lyndon there might be a floor fight, and Johnson should decide whether he wanted to face it.

Bobby's own feeling about Johnson at this point was neutral. It has been widely reported, and accepted, that Bobby Kennedy tried to block Johnson from the ticket. This is simply not accurate. At first, in fact, he fully endorsed the judgment that picking Johnson was a shrewd political move. When he went with me to check the labor leaders, and learned for the first time how enraged they were, he began to worry. In any case, the hard feelings that later developed between Bobby and Johnson did not begin here. Bobby was merely acting as an envoy.

Bobby went to Johnson's suite and talked with Sam Rayburn and John Connally, explaining to them that there was a threat of a floor fight against Johnson and suggesting that Lyndon might want to withdraw if he didn't want to get involved in such a battle. "Do you think he might be interested in being chairman of the National Committee?" Bobby asked. Rayburn, incredulous at the idea, dismissed it with a four-letter word.

Kennedy got on the phone and reassured Johnson that if he was willing to face a floor fight the Vice Presidency was his. Johnson agreed, and that was how he got on the ticket.

President Kennedy often used to needle me later over a glass in the evening when I was trying to disagree with one of his decisions, "Don't forget that day I had to straighten you out in the bathroom in Los Angeles. If I listened to you, Lyndon would still be running the Senate instead of safely tucked away."

As Vice President, Johnson felt sidetracked and ignored, and sorely missed the patronage and the power he had enjoyed when he was the majority leader in the Senate. He blamed his fallen prestige on Bobby Kennedy, and it was on this point that bad feelings between the two of them began to build. He felt that Bobby had taken over his rightful position as the number two man in the government, which was true enough. The President sometimes pointed out with great amusement to Johnson that many of Bobby's friends in the Administration, who were always trying to push him into running the State Department as well as the Justice Department, looked upon his younger brother as the real number one man in the government.

President Kennedy was always uncomfortably aware of Johnson's unhappiness in the Vice Presidency and leaned over backwards to keep him involved in important government affairs. He issued a firm order that everybody in the White House was to be courteous and considerate with Johnson and held me personally responsible that the order not be ignored. Only two men in the government, Johnson and Bobby Kennedy, were given the special privilege of entering the President's office at any time unseen through the back door from the garden, without following the normal route into the front door and through my office. Neither of them ever abused this privilege, and they seldom came to see the President without calling me first. Johnson often called and asked to see the President with various personal complaints, frequently about Bobby. The President and I worked out a set routine for handling Johnson's laments. The President would first hear him out alone, and then call me into his office and denounce me in front of Johnson for whatever the Vice President was beefing about. I would humbly take the blame and promise to correct the situation, and the Vice President would go away somewhat happier.

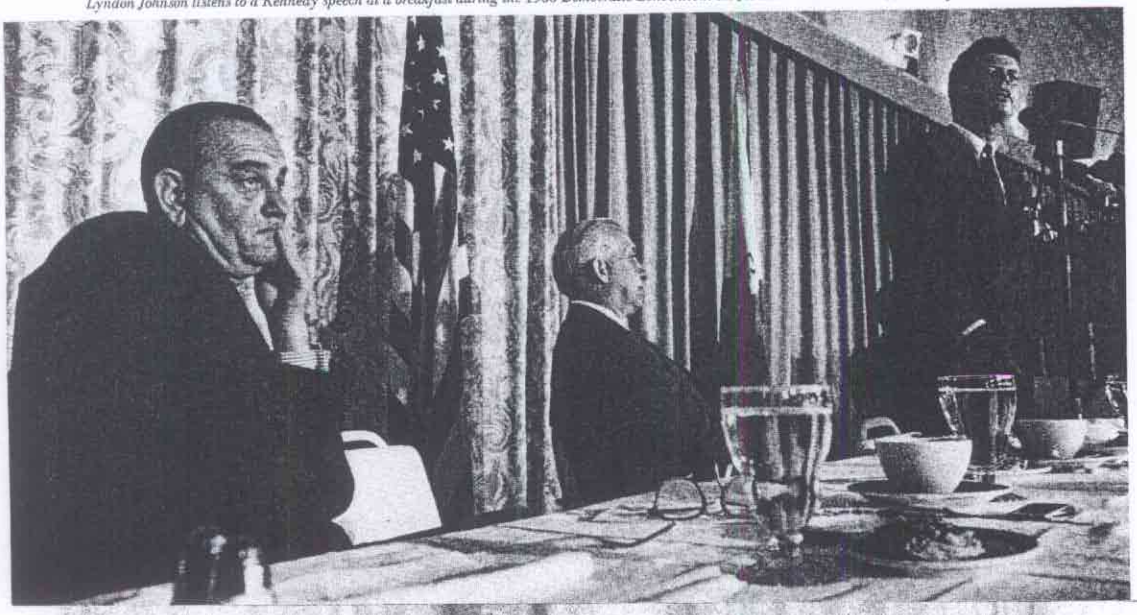
I remember one day when Johnson's complaint about Bobby ("That kid brother of yours") involved Sarah T. Hughes, the same long-time Texas friend who later as a federal judge in Dallas swore Johnson in as President in the hot and sticky cabin of Air Force One after the assassination.

"Damn it, Kenny, you've gone and done it again," the President said when he called me into his office. "Lyndon, you go ahead and tell him yourself what's happened this time."

Johnson began a long recital of woe, prefacing it, as he usually did, with a recollection of John

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Lyndon Johnson listens to a Kennedy speech at a breakfast during the 1960 Democratic Convention. As J.F.K.'s Vice President, Johnson felt sidetracked and ignored



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Nance Garner describing the Vice Presidency as a thankless office with as much prestige as a pitcher of warm spit. He explained that he had asked Bobby Kennedy a few months earlier for a federal judgeship in Texas for Sarah Hughes, and when the Justice Department told him that Mrs. Hughes, then 65, was too old for the position, he had explained sorrowfully to Mrs. Hughes that she couldn't have the job, and had offered the appointment to another Texas lawyer. Now, Johnson said, he had just returned from Berlin to learn to his deep embarrassment that Mrs. Hughes had been given the judgeship after all, and, checking around, he'd found out how "ole Lyndon had been done in behind his back as usual."

Bobby Kennedy, it turned out, had encountered another prominent Texan, Sam Rayburn, the Speaker of the House, and asked the Speaker when two key Justice Department bills would be getting out of the Judiciary Committee. Rayburn ventured the opinion that the bills might never get out if his friend Sarah Hughes did not get a judgeship in Texas. Bobby explained that she had been suggested by Johnson but she was too old for the appointment. Rayburn, who was almost 80, glared at the 35-year-old Kennedy. "Son, everybody looks old to you. Do you want those bills passed, or don't you?" The next day Sarah Hughes was nominated for the federal bench.

"Mr. President," Johnson cried now, "you realize where this leaves me? Sarah Hughes now thinks I'm nothing. The lawyer I offered the job to after your brother turned Sarah down, he thinks I'm the biggest liar and fool in the history of the State of Texas. All on account of that brother of yours!" The President was unable to keep from laughing, and the Vice President, seeing the humor of the situation, laughed, too.

Johnson suspected that Bobby Kennedy was engineering a move to dump him as the Vice Presidential candidate in 1964. Johnson was sure that Kennedy had been behind the exposure of Bobby Baker, a Johnson protégé. It was a ridiculous assumption because a scandal of any kind reflecting on the Democrats was the last thing the Kennedys wanted. Furthermore, President Kennedy never had any thought of dumping Johnson. I was sitting with the President and Senator George Smathers on the way to Florida the Saturday in November of 1963 before he went to Dallas. Smathers asked him if he was planning to get rid of Johnson because of the Baker case.

The President glanced at Smathers and said, "George, you must be the dumbest man in the world. If I drop Lyndon, it will look as if we have a serious scandal on our hands in the Bobby Baker case, which we haven't, and that will reflect on me. It will look as though I made a mistake in picking Lyndon in 1960, and can you imagine the mess of trying to select somebody to replace him? Lyndon stays on the ticket next year."

MacArthur's views on Vietnam stunned Kennedy

President Kennedy first began to have doubts about our military effort in Vietnam in 1961 when both General Douglas MacArthur and General Charles de Gaulle warned him that the Asian mainland was no place to be fighting a non-nuclear land war. There was no end to Asiatic manpower, MacArthur told the President, and even if we poured a million American infantry soldiers into that continent, we would still find ourselves outnumbered on every side.

The president's first meeting with MacArthur, a courtesy call on the general in New York after the Bay of Pigs disaster, turned out to be an agreeable surprise to Kennedy. Like a lot of Navy veterans of the Pacific war, Kennedy had assumed that MacArthur was a stuffy and pompous egocentric. Instead, the President told us later, MacArthur was one of the most fascinating conversationalists he had ever met, politically shrewd and intellectually sharp. Later the President invited the general to the White House for lunch. They talked for almost three hours, ruining the whole appointments schedule for that day. I could not drag them apart. The President later gave us a complete rerun of MacArthur's remarks, expressing a warm admiration for this supposedly reactionary old soldier that astonished all of us. MacArthur was extremely critical of the military advice that the President had been getting from the Pentagon, blaming the military leaders of the previous 10 years, who, he said, had advanced the wrong younger officers. "You were lucky to have that mistake happen in Cuba, where the strategic cost was not too great," he said about the Bay of Pigs. MacArthur implored the President to avoid a U.S. military build-up in Vietnam, or any other part of the Asian mainland, because he felt that the domino theory was ridiculous in a nuclear age. MacArthur went on to point out that there were domestic problems—the urban crisis, the ghettos, the economy—that should have far more priority than Vietnam. Kennedy came out of the meeting somewhat stunned. That a man like MacArthur should give him such unmilitary advice impressed him enormously.

Late in 1962, when the U.S. was accelerating shipments of reinforcements to South Vietnam, Senator Mike Mansfield visited the President at Palm Beach, where the Kennedy family had gathered for the Christmas holidays. The Senate majority leader, whose opinions the President deeply respected, had just returned from a trip to Southeast Asia, which he had made at the President's request. Mansfield emphatically advised, first, a curb on sending more military reinforcements to South Vietnam and, then, a withdrawal of U.S. forces from that country's civil war, a suggestion that startled the President. A continued steady increase of American military advisers in South Vietnam, the senator argued, would lead to sending still more forces to beef up those that were there, and soon the Americans would be dominating the combat in a civil war that was not our war. Taking over the military leadership and the fighting in the Vietnam war, Mansfield warned, would hurt American prestige in Asia and would not help the South Vietnamese to stand on their own feet, either. The President was too disturbed by the senator's unexpected argument to reply to it. He said to me later when we talked about the discussion, "I got angry with Mike for disagreeing with our policy so completely, and I got angry with myself because I found myself agreeing with him."



General MacArthur and Kennedy conclude their three-hour meeting at the White House in 1961.

Publicly over the next few months the President continued to stress the need for bolstering the South Vietnamese government of Diem, even though he was embarrassed by Diem's terrorist brother Nhu. But we noticed that privately Kennedy complained that everybody in the State Department and the Defense Department seemed to be forgetting that our role in Vietnam should be political rather than military. In the spring of 1963, Mike Mansfield again criticized our military involvement in Vietnam, this time in front of the congressional leadership at a White House breakfast, much to the President's annoyance and embarrassment. Leaving the breakfast the President seized my arm and said, "Get Mike and have him come into my office." I sat in on part of their discussion. The President told Mansfield that he had been having serious second thoughts about Mansfield's argument and that he now agreed with the senator's thinking on the need for a complete military withdrawal from Vietnam.

"But I can't do it until 1965—after I'm reelected," Kennedy told Mansfield.

President Kennedy felt, and Mansfield agreed with him, that if he announced a total withdrawal of American military personnel from Vietnam before the 1964 election, there would be a wild conservative outcry against returning him to the Presidency for a second term.

After Mansfield left the office, the President told me that he had made up his mind that after his reelection he would take the risk of unpopularity and make a complete withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam. "In 1965, I'll be

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The need to get rid of Bobby haunted Johnson

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damned everywhere as a Communist appeaser. But I don't care. If I tried to pull out completely now, we would have another Joe McCarthy red scare on our hands, but I can do it after I'm reelected. So we had better make damned sure that I *am* reelected."

That fall, before he went to Dallas, the President was so disgusted with Diem and Nhu that he decided to put pressure on them to liberalize their police state government. Along with sharply reducing economic aid to Diem, the President issued an order, against the objections of many around him, to reduce American military advisers in South Vietnam immediately by bringing home 1,000 U.S. soldiers before the end of 1963. This was a considerable troop withdrawal at that time because the American forces in South Vietnam then numbered only about 16,000.

On Oct. 2, when Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and General Maxwell Taylor came to a meeting of the National Security Council to report on a trip to Saigon, President Kennedy asked McNamara to announce to the press after the meeting the immediate withdrawal of 1,000 soldiers and to say that we would probably withdraw all American forces from Vietnam by the end of 1965. As McNamara was leaving the meeting to talk to the White House reporters, the President called to him, "And tell them that means all of the helicopter pilots, too."

The anti-Diem coup of Nov. 1, 1963 came as no surprise to President Kennedy, but the brutal killings of Diem and Nhu, committed by the rebels in spur-of-the-moment anger, shocked and depressed him. The President was not averse to the idea of changing the government for a practical and useful purpose. One day when he was talking with Dave Powers and me about pulling out of Vietnam, we asked him how he could manage a military withdrawal without losing American prestige in Southeast Asia.

"Easy," he said. "Put a government in there that will ask us to leave."

The President's order to reduce the American military personnel in Vietnam by 1,000 men before the end of 1963 was still in effect on the day that he went to Texas.

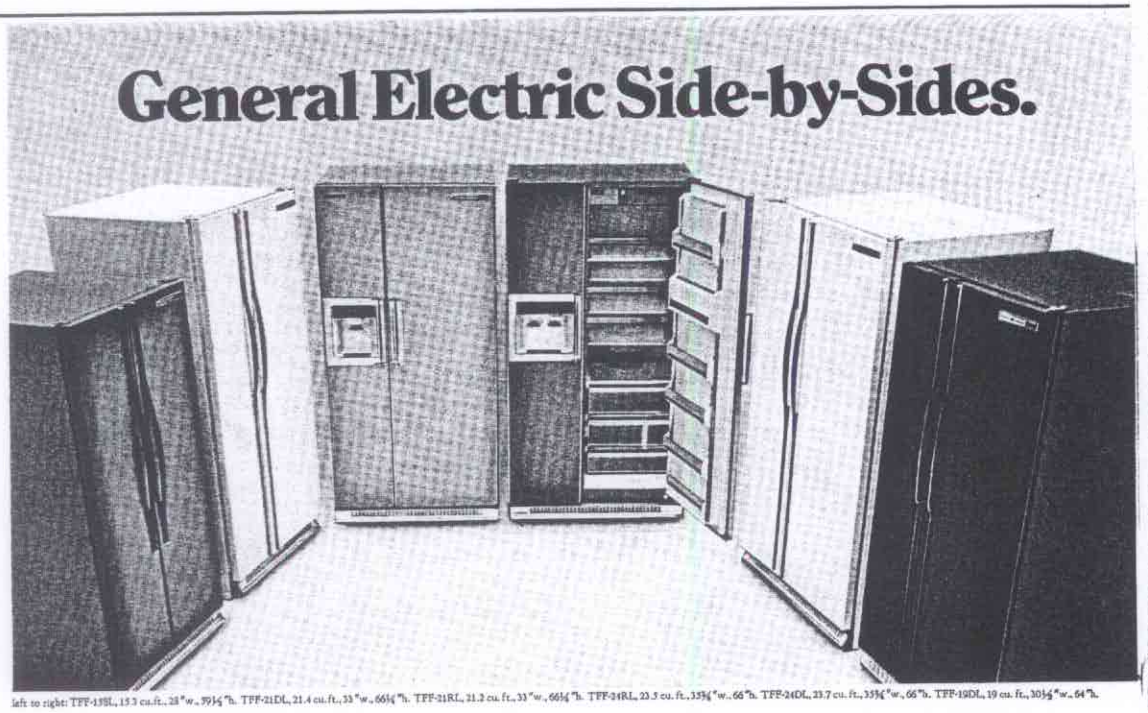
After the President's death, I had several talks with Bobby Kennedy about going back to work at the White House. I felt that if Kennedy's key people left it would cause party problems during the coming election year, and Bobby agreed.

The first time I talked alone with Lyndon Johnson after the assassination was in December 1963 aboard Air Force One, on the way to Bill Green's funeral in Philadelphia. He told me then that he did not want Bobby Kennedy as his Vice Presidential candidate in 1964.

"I don't want history to say I was elected to this office because I had Bobby Kennedy on the ticket with me," he said. "But I'll take him if I need him." In other words, if the Republicans nominated a more liberal candidate than Barry Goldwater, Johnson realized that he might be forced to take Kennedy as his Vice President.

The simple fact was that Johnson didn't want *anybody* to be his Vice President. He felt threatened by anyone who had a constituency. That, in Johnson's eyes, would detract from his own victory. Through the spring of 1964 I saw firsthand the strange, agonized gyrations that President Johnson went through as he planned for the Democratic Convention.

There were two reasons why I felt we had the leverage with Johnson to influence crucially the selection of the Vice President. First, Johnson badly needed me and other Kennedy staffers as his links to Democratic leaders around the country. His contacts with them were unbelievably slight; he had always directed his energy and attention



left to right: TFF-15SL, 15.3 cu.ft., 28"w., 39¼"h. TFF-21DL, 21.4 cu.ft., 33"w., 66¼"h. TFF-21RL, 21.2 cu.ft., 33"w., 66¼"h. TFF-24RL, 23.5 cu.ft., 35¾"w., 66"h. TFF-24DL, 23.7 cu.ft., 35¾"w., 66"h. TFF-19DL, 19 cu.ft., 30⅛"w., 64"h.



A rare photograph shows Kennedy in his office with glasses he always avoided wearing in public.

toward congressional leaders and not to the real party movers on the state level. He knew few of them personally.

Second, and perhaps more important, Johnson wanted to avoid any unnecessary fight with Bobby Kennedy. He was obsessed, by this time, with the idea that Kennedy would force himself into the Vice Presidency by going to the floor of the convention. He brought it up to me repeatedly, usually asking with real annoyance why Bobby didn't voluntarily withdraw and prevent trouble. Just as often I told him of the numerous calls I was getting from party leaders across the country who were sure Bobby could win a floor fight, and why not do it.

I was, at this point, in a unique position: Johnson had made me executive director of his election campaign, and at the same time I was the only real communications bridge between the President and Bobby. They rarely said a word to each other. When either man wanted the other to know something, he would ask me to pass it on. Johnson trusted me to be honest with him, and I was. I told the President that my loyalty was to Bobby, and if he did try to become Vice President, I would resign and work for him.

His zeal to get rid of Bobby had by now become so intense it extended even to spoiling Kennedy's chances to run in 1972. The two persons, Johnson felt, who might be able to displace Bobby permanently were Sargent Shriver, a member of the Kennedy family, and Senator Eugene McCarthy, a Catholic. Johnson, who had a brilliant eye for people's soft spots, went after Shriver first.

One day in March I was sitting alone with the President in his office when Bill Moyers' voice came on the interoffice talk box. Apparently not knowing I was listening, Moyers told the President he had sounded out Shriver about accepting the Vice Presidential nomination. Shriver was agreeable, Moyers said, and the Kennedy family had no objection, not even Bobby. Johnson, grinning, looked at me questioningly. "The hell he wouldn't," I said, loud enough for Moyers to hear me. I had discussed with Bobby several times the way the President was trying to use Shriver. Bobby felt hurt about the way Shriver had responded to Johnson's overtures; he thought Shriver should have kept him more informed. Afterwards I told the President we would fight the maneuver, that if any Kennedy was to be on the ticket it should be Bobby, and Johnson accepted that gracefully.

The McCarthy move ended almost as quickly. The President urged McCarthy to go visit party leaders in the big states: Dick Daley, Jesse Unruh, Frank Smith. But these men were tied fast to what was still a Kennedy organization, and they gave McCarthy no encouragement. One day Johnson said to me, "I want to have a Catholic running with me. What do you people think about Gene McCarthy?" I said to him, "How can you pick the number two senator from Minnesota over the number one senator from Minnesota, Hubert Humphrey, who is better qualified and more strongly backed, only because the second man

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Bobby agreed to delay his plans and help Humphrey

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is a Catholic? Catholics would resent that."

It was clear by now to Johnson that the Kennedy camp wanted Humphrey to be Vice President. It was fully as clear to us that Johnson was not eager to have Humphrey. The President frequently ridiculed the garrulous Minnesota senator in private and our fondness for Hubert never failed to baffle him.

Johnson called a meeting the middle of April of his political staff composed of Larry O'Brien, James Rowe, Richard Maguire, Walter Jenkins, Jack Valenti, Bill Moyers, John Bailey and myself. The President instructed Jenkins to read the results of a survey which presumed to show that a Catholic candidate was crucial to the ticket. He then polled the group—which was about 90% Catholic—and was both angered and amazed to find all the Kennedy people present were for Humphrey. Johnson broke up the meeting and asked me to come alone into the little room off the Oval Office. After a lengthy discussion in which I underscored that Humphrey was our unanimous choice, Johnson finally said, "Well, if you guys want Humphrey, you've got him. You can leak it out now, if you want to. I won't deny it."

With this commitment from Johnson, and with Shriver and McCarthy stalled, the road looked clear for Humphrey. But I didn't really believe Johnson would make good on his promise. I felt the pressure had to be kept on him, and the best way was to keep him guessing about Bobby's plans.

Bobby, meanwhile, had finally come to some conclusions about his own future: he concluded that Goldwater would win the nomination, and even if Goldwater didn't and Johnson wanted him, Kennedy did not place much worth in the Vice Presidency. He was increasingly certain he could not work well with the President. Bobby's recent trips to Poland and Berlin, where crowds had received him with adulation, had unsettled Johnson and further deepened his already well-developed suspicions about Bobby and his motives.

We discussed all this one May night at Bobby's Hickory Hill home with his brother Ted, brother-in-law Steve Smith, Larry O'Brien and Fred Dutton. Bobby told us he had decided to avoid the Vice Presidency, resign as Attorney General and go to New York. Ted and Steve wanted him to announce his candidacy for the Senate immediately. Ted, especially, felt Johnson would never take Bobby under any circumstances, and, besides, it was best for his brother psychologically to separate himself from Lyndon.

I urged Bobby instead not to reveal his plans in order to keep Johnson off balance and enable us to build up support for Humphrey. If Bobby pulled out now, I said, we would lose our leverage with Lyndon, and he would feel free to pick anyone he wanted, a nonentity.

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A vigorous argument developed. Bobby by then had virtually decided to get out. I told him that without him we would certainly fail. I put it to him on a personal basis: we owed it to ourselves, and to those who supported his brother, to make sure we were represented by someone in the government. "Hubert is the best man around who represents our views." I said. The argument for Hubert as Vice President was much less persuasive to Bobby than the charge that what happened now was *his* responsibility.

He finally agreed. To me this was one of the finest moments of his controversial career. His best interests were to leave for New York immediately. Otherwise it would appear as though he was waiting around for the Vice Presidency and then later deigning to take the lesser job in New York. No one has ever fully appreciated how much personal political damage Bobby suffered because of this delay. As I was leaving the house that night, he shouted to me, "When they start the 'ruthless brat' stuff, O'Donnell, you be there to bleed along with me."

While Bobby remained quiet, Johnson had reached a fitful state. He asked almost daily what Kennedy planned to do. Late in July, right after the Republicans nominated Goldwater, the President at last felt free to cut Bobby loose. After their meeting at the White House, Kennedy came straight to the nearby Sans Souci restaurant and joined Larry O'Brien and me. He was tremendously relieved and in high good humor. While he was talking, a telephone was handed to me. The President was on the line. He said, "I just talked to your friend. Come over here right away."

"Mr. President, I want to be honest," I said. "The Attorney General is sitting here with me."

At the last minute, Johnson wanted Mansfield

"That's all right," Johnson said. "We've got to put out an announcement right away."

When I got to the White House, Johnson explained to me he was ruling out any member of his Cabinet being on the ticket. Together, Johnson and I sat down and worked out the words of the announcement, and afterwards he picked up the phone and began calling the Cabinet members to tell them.

That evening, after Bobby had been dropped, my wife telephoned me to say that Humphrey was waiting for me at the Mayflower Hotel. I went there and told him what had happened. "Bobby just got the ax," I said, "and you're next unless you put up a fight." Humphrey asked if we would go to the convention floor for him. I said we would, positively.

The next day Humphrey and I had a drink with Jack Conway, Walter Reuther's political aide, at the Hay-Adams Hotel. Conway assured us that he would work to get support for Humphrey from the labor union leaders. The day after that, when the dropping of Bobby and the rest of the Cabinet members was finally announced by Johnson, Bobby went to Humphrey's office in the Senate Office Building to put his arm around Hubert and to announce to the press that Humphrey was his choice. This was the first public indication that the Kennedy forces were backing Humphrey and it startled Johnson.

Then Johnson was hit by a barrage of Humphrey endorsements from several state governors —Hughes of Iowa, Hughes of New Jersey, Brown of California, Reynolds of Wisconsin, among others—and from such labor leaders as Reuther, Meany and David Dubinsky. As the pressure for Humphrey mounted, Johnson became resentful and peevish. He treated Hubert rudely at White House meetings and Washington social affairs, often asking him in front of a group of people what he thought of Shriver or McCarthy or Senator Tom Dodd of Connecticut as Vice Presidential possibilities. Humphrey, as eager as he was for the Vice Presidency, held his tongue and never lost his temper and begged his friends not to push Johnson too hard.

A few weeks before the convention, Johnson made one last stab at dropping Humphrey and picking somebody else whom even Humphrey's supporters would have hesitated to oppose—Senator Mike Mansfield. Even those of us who were working in the White House did not suspect that Johnson was considering Mansfield until the senator from Montana was proposed as a Vice Presidential candidate in a full-blown column by William S. White, the newspaperman who is one of Johnson's closest Texan friends. White had often sailed a kite for Johnson in his column so that the President could see which way the wind was blowing. This time he wrote that Johnson badly needed a Catholic on the ticket, and Mansfield was the perfect candidate.

White's naming of Mansfield was a clear signal to me that Johnson was still determined to ditch Humphrey as his running mate. On the Friday before the convention when I was at home packing my bag to go to Atlantic City, I received a telephone call from Johnson.

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President Johnson meets for breakfast with O'Donnell, Carl Hayden, Mike Mansfield. L.B.J. told O'Donnell he needed a Catholic like Mansfield instead of Humphrey.



Despite what they think, I am still the President'

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"I just think we've got to have a Catholic on that ticket," he said.

With White's column still fresh in my mind, I knew what was coming next. "Mr. President," I said, "I thought we had all agreed that Senator Humphrey was going to be the Vice President."

"Well, agreements come and go," he said. "The most important thing is that we win the Presidency. I've been looking at some new polls. I've decided on Mike Mansfield."

I couldn't say anything.

"Kenny, you can't be against Mansfield, you nor any of the other Kennedy people," Johnson said. "He's one of you. You guys all admire him and respect him. If you're worried about Bobby and 1972, Mike's ideal. He's too old to run then."

Rather weakly, I replied, "Mr. President, I don't think Mike Mansfield will take the nomination."

"Let me tell you something—that's what they said about little old Lyndon in 1960," the President said. "When they lead you up on that mountain, and show you those green fields down below and that beautiful White House standing there —you know what you do? You take it. They all take it." Then, without saying anything more, he hung up.

In Atlantic City I heard nothing more about the Mansfield proposal. I never mentioned to anybody my conversation with Johnson until one day last year when I was in Washington talking with Mansfield about something else. When we finished I asked Mike what had happened between him and Johnson. He took his pipe out of his mouth and smiled.

"I saw White's column, too," Mansfield said, "and like everybody else in Washington, I knew what it meant. I waited a while and then I decided to beat him to the punch. I went to the White House and said to him, 'Mr. President, I saw Mr. White's article about me and I want you to know that under no circumstances will I ever accept the nomination as Vice President.' And that ended that."

Ironically, Johnson was trying to play the identical game with Mansfield that John Kennedy had played with him in 1960—offering him the Vice Presidency to remove him from the leadership in the Senate. After five months of working with the tough Irishman from Montana, Johnson discovered he was not a man to be manipulated easily.



From the time he first joined the Kennedys in 1960, Johnson was uncomfortable with them. L.B.J. and Bobby appeared together (above in 1966) but rarely met in private.

I often felt sorry for Lyndon Johnson during those unhappy months in 1964 when he was trying to fill out the remainder of John Kennedy's term, trying to work with Kennedy's Cabinet and White House staff. He wanted to be a good President, but he was uncomfortably aware that most of the Kennedy people in official Washington were cool toward him, particularly the Eastern Ivy Leaguers in the government who regarded his presence in the White House as an unhappy accident. He was in a hard situation, striving courageously to do his best under unpleasant circumstances. I particularly remember one evening that spring when all of us were invited to a cocktail party for Jacqueline Kennedy at the F Street Club. President Johnson almost plaintively asked Larry O'Brien and me to go to the party with him. When we arrived at the club, we found that the three of us were the only ones there in business suits. Everyone else was dressed in formal evening clothes. Obviously they were all going later to an embassy dinner that the President had not planned to attend. Everyone was swarming around Jackie Kennedy, who was radiant and happy to be making her first social appearance since her husband's funeral, and nobody was paying much attention to Johnson. I stood in a corner with the President, having a drink with him, and he said to me after a while, "I guess they're all going someplace to a dinner. Are you going with them?" I said I had to go back to work. He said to me, "Would you mind coming back to the White House and having another drink?" He was silent in the car while we were riding to the White House and then he said, "Despite what they think, I am still the President of the United States. But I didn't want it this way."

After the 1964 election I felt it was time to leave the White House. However, Johnson hated anybody to leave him. "Nobody leaves Lyndon unless Lyndon wants him to go," he often said. I began to see that I would never get away until I made the move on my own and I knew that would irritate him.

One day in January I told President Johnson's assistants, Bill Moyers and Jack Valenti, to pass along the word that I was leaving whether my resignation was accepted or not. Moyers called me back and told me that the President would see me in an hour. I found him in his office, standing at his desk with my letter of resignation in his hand. He was in a bad mood.

"So you're really going to leave?" he said.

I explained that I wanted to go back to Boston. He didn't ask me what I planned to do and he didn't say goodby or wish me good luck. He said only, "It's all right with me and when you leave, take Dave Powers with you. He never works for anybody except you and the Kennedys anyway."

Those were the last words I ever heard from Lyndon Johnson. He never spoke to me again. ■